

## *In Response*

### The Complex Case of Brownstein and Shull's Review of Schwartz and Lacey

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*Behaviorism, Science, and Human Nature* (Schwartz & Lacey, 1982) promises to be a source of controversy and discussion among behavior analysts for some time to come. If the review by Brownstein and Shull (1983) is at all representative, the most common judgment is that Schwartz and Lacey have constructed a straw man account of behavior theory, which they proceed to topple easily. Although I agree that the book overlooks some of behavior theory's strengths (especially as they relate to accounting for complex behavior) and unfairly burdens it with simplistic assumptions (for example, the assumption that "a relatively complete explanation of human behavior" must be "based almost entirely on the influence of rewards and punishments," Schwartz & Lacey, 1982, p. 40), I nonetheless have a far different impression of the overall effect. For if the book makes a case *against* behavior theory, it makes an even stronger one *for* it.

Schwartz & Lacey's central argument is as follows. Behavior theory is a steadily progressing program of research that has recently made major empirical discoveries (e.g., the matching law—pp. 104-112) and important conceptual breakthroughs (e.g., the economic interpretation of operant concepts—pp. 112-123) that move it closer to being able to account for complex human behavior. Although many critics dismiss this possibility by citing biological constraints on learning, these constraints do not necessarily pose serious problems for the applicability of behavior theory to human operant behavior, where they seem to play a smaller role than is the case with animal operant behavior (pp. 190-191). Furthermore, the successful applications of behavior theory to education and psy-

chopathology lend crucial support to the conclusion that it is "certainly not unreasonable" to expect behavior theory eventually to account even for complex human behavior involving "planning, flexibility, and intelligent variation" (p. 222). Despite these strong arguments in support of behavior theory's potential to provide a complete account of human behavior, however, the authors eventually opt for what they offer as the major alternative—namely, the language of common sense and the folk psychology implicit in it (pp. 222-259).

Now, protests of Brownstein and Shull to the contrary notwithstanding, I find this argument to tip heavily in the direction of behavior theory. For presented with a choice between a rapidly progressing research program and mere common sense, scientific method dictates choosing the research program and brushing aside Schwartz and Lacey's rather weak plea for common sense.

Ironically, however, Brownstein and Shull take issue with each of the major premises supporting this conclusion: the matching law is not clearly a genuine principle of behavior (Brownstein & Shull, 1983, p. 82), the economic interpretation is suspect (pp. 81-83), the applications to human behavior are illicit (pp. 86-87), and the book does "the reader a disservice to the extent that the reader is led to perceive the issue as a choice simply between types of understanding: everyday vs. scientific" (p. 78).

But, taking these objections in order, how many principles upon the frontier of any expanding research tradition are clearly genuine principles of that tradition, or do not appear to some members of that tradition to be suspect? And if some applications to human behavior are

illicit, surely others are not. Finally, (and here is the major flaw in the case for behavior theory), although Schwartz and Lacey may have done the reader a disservice by suggesting that the choice is between an everyday and a scientific understanding of behavior, it is not behavior theory that is the principal victim of this suggestion, but cognitive psychology. For if folk psychology is the major competitor of behavior theory, then many of the significant issues about psychological method get settled by default. Neverthe-

less, at a time when it is common to dismiss behaviorism with a wink, Schwartz and Lacey have produced a sustained 250 page argument that examines this tradition with the seriousness it deserves.

#### REFERENCES

- Brownstein, A. J., & Shull, R. L. (1983). The analysis of complex cases: A review of Schwartz and Lacey's *Behaviorism, Science, and Human Nature*. *The Behavior Analyst*, 6, 77-91.
- Schwartz, B., & Lacey, H. (1982). *Behaviorism, Science, and Human Nature*. New York: Norton.